The Seed Sower.

A Magazine for the Church, the School, and the Home.

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To our Readers.

We have pleasure in announcing that on and after January 1st, the Rev. L. P. Jacks, M.A. will be associated with Mr. Wood in the editorship of the *Seed Sower*. It will be the aim of the Editors to maintain the *Seed Sower* at a high level of interest. Many of our readers speak of it as "a bright little magazine," and it finds a welcome in many of our homes and congregations. One feature of the New Year's issue will be a series of Lesson-notes for Sunday School Teachers, supplying those teachers who have little time for reading with materials for their class work ready to hand and that can be effectively used after a little study. The home circle will be borne in mind, and it is hoped that the Children's Page will be found as attractive as ever. From time to time "Editorial Notes" will deal with events and questions of the time having interest for our churches.

It is suggested that every congregation in the Midlands should appoint some officer to forward local congregational news to the *Seed Sower*.

The circulation of the *Seed Sower* can be largely increased by a little exertion on the part of its friends. It only needs a very slight additional effort to make it self supporting. On many hands the assurance is given that it is doing a good work, and is found a most welcome missionary agent. Will not our friends help to make it a still greater success?

Communications for the Editors should be addressed to 120, Gough Road, Birmingham.

All business communications should be made to Mr. Arnold Wood, 31, Paradise Street, Birmingham.

Sonnets for the New Year.

Good-day, new world! Like him of Genoa,
We, glad adventurers, kneel and kiss the strand
Of our emprise,—this new-discovered land
Of Time,—and cry, "Good-day, new world, good-day!'
Onward brave hearts 'gainst odds would say us nay.
These hostile ills which lurk on every hand,
Make them allies that lead us into grand
Possession of ourselves and of the way.
O Year! New Year! world yet untried and strange!
For him who this adventures, all good things
You hold in store, for he it is who brings
Hope to the front, and courage; him no change
Shall harm or weaken, nor shall any chance
Rob him of his divine inheritance.

C. A. MASON.

(*"Another year, then—what for? It is a block of marble, and you're the sculptor. What will you make of it?*)

White possibility! Before thee now
With chisel and with mallet in my hand,
A musing artist, hesitant I stand,
And wonder with what shape I'll thee endow,—
A grand Athene with majestic brow,
A raging fury with his burning brand,
Diana leading on her huntress brood,
Or sea-nymph spoiling round some rippling prow?
Or shall I carve out Aphrodite fair,
Who melteth with her eye the hearts of men?
No; better yet, I'll make a Victory,
Whose upward look shall rouse men from despair,
Discouraged souls thrill with new hope again,
And give them strength to bear, and do, and be.

M. J. SAVAGE.

Change—A Sermon for the New Year.

By the Rev. L. P. Jacks, M.A.

Acts xvii., 21.—"Now all the Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time in nothing else but either to hear or tell some new thing."

The Athenians to whom this description was applied lived in a period of national decadence. The desire for something new had degenerated into the aimless curiosity of vacant minds. By the death of their national life, the Athenians had lost the aspirations after great ends which once made their city the most brilliant light-centre that ever illuminated the world. They still retained their intelligence and their versatility; but these qualities had lost their high uses; the day of small things had come; curiosity and gossip were now the chief employments of leisure. The same desire for some new thing had always characterised the Athenians. But in earlier days it had taken a higher form. When Athens was in her glory it had stimulated research into the undiscovered secrets of nature; it had led men on to develop the hidden powers of skill and beauty that resided in the hand and brain, and had produced a richer harvest of new truths in science and new creations in art than was ever achieved in any equal period of human history. But when St. Paul visited Athens all this had passed away. The desire for something new was no longer that noble desire to discover truth and to create beauty which belongs to the vigour of a nation's life, but only the eagerness of petty minds to behold and gossip about any chance novelty that happened to fall in their way.

But this quality of desiring to see something new, you will be prepared to hear, is by no means confined to ancient Athens. In every civilised community of the modern world, and in every uncivilised one for the matter of that, you see the same desire existing on a much larger scale and in conjunction with far wider opportunities of getting itself gratified. It still marks a degenerate state of mind; but our modern communities are so large that they can tolerate a degenerate section in their midst without being involved in general decay. The degenerate section to-day consists of that idle and dangerous class, who, being possessed of ample means, have no better aim in life than to run up and down the world seeking new forms of excitement, new varieties of self-indulgence, new and more highly-spiced concoctions of pleasure and amusement. As for them the time has come when the Divine laws no longer permit them to possess the earth for their own ends, and the time is coming when as a class they will be no more—for "God shall persecute them with His tempest and make them afraid with His storm." But outside of these there is a wider class of persons whom one can hardly call degenerate without condemning oneself—a class of whom it were truer to say that the desire for something new plagues them than that they use it as a means for plaguing other people. They—or perhaps I ought to say *we*, but for the moment we may let the more uncharitable pronoun stand—they are perpetually seeking change of circumstance, change of environment, change of scene. Stung by the desire for novelty, they travel about, they change their friends, they alter their houses, they vary the programmes of the day's doings, they pull down their barns and build larger, and then outdoing the man in the parable they pull down the larger and build something smaller and more exquisite. They are never so well off either in friends, in money, or in domestic happiness as not to find reason for being discontented in the fact that they are not better off: however much they may have things to their liking they have always got their eyes fixed on a possible state of things that would be more to their liking still, and their eagerness to possess themselves of the thing that might be robs them of all joy in the possession of the thing that is. They scour the world—not the geographical earth only, but the far larger world of possibilities of which money gives command—hunting for new views, for new companionships, for new sensations to satisfy an appetite which is already too jaded to be satiable by anything under the sun. Their gospel is expressed in a line of the poet:

> Variety's the spice of life, that gives it all its savour.

By acting on that maxim they exist in a state of perpetual preparation for life—but they never live.

The desire for something new is generally at its strongest while we are young, and it would be altogether over-shooting the mark to deny that, for those who are young, this kind of variety

is the cause of much innocent pleasure. The reason is that it is much easier to find variety in youth. Things keep their newness longer, and the time has not yet come when we can say we have made an end of all things and found them vanity. Besides, we too are always changing. So long as the tissues are flexible, and the fluid sentiments have not yet consolidated into the fixity of final character it is easy for us to leap to the spirit of new scenes, new employment, new companionships. But when the hunger for novelty pursues us beyond the boundary of youth—and a glance round will convince anyone how often it does so—then change becomes continuously less successful, as a means of adding to the true pleasure of life. Novelty is harder to find, and, when found, its newness wears off almost before we are aware that it is new. We travel, and how soon one place begins to look like another. We build a new house, and how very soon we begin to feel in that new house just as we felt in the old. We re-arrange the plan of our lives, but in a day or two we find the worth of life so unaltered that we wonder if it was worth the trouble. We try a different system with our friends, our children, our servants, but presently we find ourselves carrying out the new system in a spirit so exactly similar to that in which we carried out the old, that it comes to practically the same thing in the end. We mingle with all sorts and conditions of men; we try different classes of society; we invite Germans and Frenchmen to our houses; we may even discover a Hindu or a Japanese; and yet, after a time, all men seem wonderfully alike. The differences are so small; the resemblances are so great; a huge mantle of sameness descends on all the items of our world—its scenery, its men, its vocations. A certain superficial variety still remains, it is true, but nothing near so great as that we promised ourselves when we set out in search of the new. We begin to read the book of Ecclesiastes with a fresh appreciation of the intelligence of its author. "The thing that hath been is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun."

This is what very often happens. But it is what ought to happen never. If it does happen, sure token is it that the man has wandered from the way of life. Why is it that so many men and women have hardly passed the spring-time of youth—and many others, alas, while youth ought still to be theirs—but immediately the world begins to grow flat and stale, and man a more or less uninteresting object to contemplate? To a really healthy spirit the world ought to be ever new; his brother man ought to be more and more interesting. Why then do so many presently find it hard to discover anything new in nature, in man or in themselves? The explanation is very simple. It is that they themselves have become fixed and stiffened in spirit; it is that they have allowed the principle of growth to vanish out of their lives; it is that the living well of water, which ought to be sending fresh streams of life through them to all eternity, has been suffered to dry up, and left only a few stagnant pools of ditch-water to remind the soul of its former existence. They have become selfish and worldly; they have dropped self-sacrifice, which keeps the sap of life in circulation, and fallen into the sere and yellow leaf of sameness and deadness of soul. Sameness—when sameness falls on a human spirit—sameness inevitably falls upon the world in which that human spirit lives. When the principle of growth—and that principle is immortal for those who will to keep it—when the principle of growth passes from a human life—then the principle of change passes from the world—and all men and things within the circle of that life are arrested at one dead level of monotony. They change not from less to more interesting, from less to more worthy and lovable; nay, all fresh comers into that fixed circle of the unexpanding soul at once partake of the eternal sameness that exists there, take on the same forms, clothe themselves in the same colours and strut about that monotonous stage with the same air and accent as their predecessors. When once by negligence, by ignorance of the true laws of life, or by sin, a man has allowed sameness to descend on his own spirit—the reflection of that sameness is inevitably projected upon the whole world in which he moves. Nothing remains for him but to become the devotee of his own comforts, to snap his fingers at the ideal, and to smile at the name of God. Weary, flat, stale and unprofitable do all things seem except upholstery and good feeding; impractical are all gospels except those which aim at fitting men up

with a supply of the same wooden idols which he himself worships. Let him go where he will, let him do what he will, amuse his leisure as he will, yet into all the changes of men and things he will carry the one fixed quantity of himself—and to the sameness of that ungrowing spirit all things will appear pretty much the same. The blight of his own littleness lies upon the world and belittles it with his own likeness — the sleep of his own death which makes man, God, and nature all seem dead. Your friends may change, your scenes may change, your systems, plans, and programmes may change, but so long as you remain unchanged they will all ultimately come to the same thing, and that very soon. Go to the east and you will carry the west with you. Amid the palaces of Cairo, or the temples of Benares, the inner consciousness of your soul will not be materially different from what it is amid the workshops of Birmingham. That you may get a real change, you must change yourself. That your world may be new, you must be new. That your happiness may be deepened by the newness, you must be heightened and broadened in your manhood, your womanhood.

What then is it that confers this heightening and broadening quality upon a human spirit? The answer is given by that greatest of all New Testament sayings: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Carefully preserved in the dry granary of self-thought, as so many of us are, we abide alone, we change not, sameness falls upon our world and no new life becomes ours. But flung upon the need for self-sacrifice which comes to every man who essays to serve his fellow-creatures, to deal well by his neighbour, or to do thoroughly or beautifully anything that comes to his hand—flung upon that need, the self is always dying, living again in higher forms and finding at each step new meaning, new worth, new joy in life. Hence it is that persons cut off from all outward opportunity—cripples, invalids, indigent, disappointed, thwarted souls, weak in body, aged in years, poor in means, confined in space—often find a richer variety and a deeper interest in life, and behold the changes of the world over a far wider field, and greet God's sun with a sweeter and more satisfied countenance, and shew by their conversation a greater share of inner resources of delight than many a half-jaded worldling who has the whole sum of possibilities at his command. That destruction of the self which suffering and limitation bring to these persons is the charter of admission into worlds of happy life from which more fortunate souls are perhaps utterly shut out. And to you who are fortunate, whether in health, in opportunity, or otherwise, I say without a doubt of the truth of what I am saying, that you will lose the worth of existence should you ever drop that element of self-sacrifice in which your present pleasure seems to die, should you ever become a mere garnered seed. So long as that element remains with you, so long does a door stand open unto worlds of higher and richer life than you have ever possessed or even dreamed of. Lose that element and the door will be shut, and you will have to knock long and cry piteously before the Lord will open to you again. Be assured that the possibility of newness lies first in you and secondly in the world, and that to find true newness in the world it is first needful that you should be ever renewed by loving self-forgetfulness in your own minds.

But then you may say, "If to find new worlds it needs only that I should change, why not trust to time? for does not time in its passage make me yearly other than I was before?" Yes, time will change us (who knows it not?), but unfortunately it will change us in the wrong way. Upon the selfish, the idle, the drifting, the loveless life time has but one mode of operation, and it is to shrink and harden you, to shorten your outlook and narrow your vision, and make you less able to move with a free wing through the height, the length, and the depth of the spirit's world. But keep the door open, spend yourself for man, invest your powers in the disciplines of work, let the seed be sown and die, and then time will treat you so kindly and gently that through the death of the old and the birth of the new you shall witness day by day a perpetual renewal in the youth of the heart. Year by year you shall find yourself living in a larger, a better, a more satisfying world. However circumscribed your world may look to the outsider, yet you who stand in the midst shall discover this secret—that your little world hides within itself infinite worlds which one after the other disclose themselves to your vision

as you win a larger and larger freedom from the chains of self. The growing spirit has the secret of perpetual change within itself. It need not wander over the earth, it need not add to the multitude of its appurtenances—but standing where it does, the world changes from glory to glory before its eyes, so slowly that we do not mark the coming, but so surely that we cannot doubt the change when come. New reasons for trusting eternal wisdom become your daily visitants, new invitations to looking upwards and moving forwards, new incentives for doing valiantly in terrible places, new grounds for thinking lightly of death. Grown in spirit, you shall now look on nature, and there, where once you saw little but the harsh outline of a huge machine, you shall see the smile of a mother's face and a light like that of living eyes. Far below you, in regions you are never more to traverse, you shall see the spot where once you trembled and doubted, when you heard the spirits whisper, "There is no God." You have outgrown their gospel. The world in which you now live is one it will not fit. Philosophic Atheism is for a world that remains rigidly the same, which wears a fixed expression, holds a settled meaning, and moves not from the less to the more, nor from the lower to the higher. Such a static world philosophic Atheism explains well enough. But your world is dynamic. Your world is for ever changing its meaning expanding outward into heights and breadths of beauty and worth—living and not rigid,—and with such a world, Atheism, whether philosophic or unphilosophic, has nothing to do. In all this expansion, this growth, this beautifying and uplifting, you feel the life of God slowly revealing itself in yours, doors are opened into the immortal world, and your soul finds power and peace. And when old age comes it brings no fear lest all be over; but remembering the many worlds of thought and emotion and of vision through which your upward-growing spirit has already passed, you boldly conclude that an endless succession of better and fairer worlds still waits to become yours.

We must row with the oars we have and as we cannot order the wind, we are obliged to sail with the wind that God gives.

Three Parables from Ruskin.

II.

A Parable of the Plough.

In his lecture on "The place of iron in nature, art, and policy," Ruskin uses the plough as a world-wide symbol of honest useful work, associating with the plough of the husbandman that feminine plough—the needle. "A happy nation," he says, "may be defined as one in which the husband's hand is on the plough, and the housewife's on the needle; so, in due time, reaping its golden harvest, and shining in golden vesture." The labour of the plough itself, and the labour which fashions the plough, can scarcely be directed to wrong ends. The wealth thus produced is real wealth—wealth with the vital powers of human sustenance in it, and is produced in entirely beneficent ways. A plough by the most perverse ingenuity can hardly do mischief, which is more than can be said for most wealth-producing instruments. The plough may be taken as an emblem in all lands of fruitful, life-giving labour. Behold the plough! It neither cheats nor oppresses; it does not seek wealth by gambling and speculation, but by healthy toil; it never makes a profit out of another's ignorance; it does not make hideous the face of the earth, but adds to it a fresh beauty; it swindles not the widow and the fatherless; it knows no tricks of trade; it ministers not to dishonest greed; it is everywhere the sign of man's most necessary toil, and the foundation of all his vital wealth. The plough is a parable.

Do you think we have no need of such a symbol now, nor to be reminded of it?

Why the greater part of the suffering and the crime which exist at this moment in the civilised world, arises simply from people forgetting this symbol, not knowing that true wealth is eternally connected by laws of heaven and earth with resolute labour, but hoping in some way to cheat or abrogate this law of life, and to feed when they have not furrowed, and to be warm when they have not woven. Men are everywhere seeking "to acquire" wealth by other means than useful toil. Hence the constant stream of lying prospectuses flowing through the post; hence the crowds of bubble companies tempting the simple by promises of large interest; hence

an army of inspectors to see that our food is not adulterated, or that we are not put off with short weight; hence Panama swindles, and Liberator scandals; hence your millionaire at one end of the scale and your pauper at the other end; hence your prisons with a bank director in one cell, and your pickpocket in the next; hence the frightful disease of gambling; hence the eagerness with which a greedy, although pious, public rushes into word-competitions; hence every kind of speculative business on the stock exchange. All these are attempts to acquire wealth without giving its equivalent in useful labour; all these are efforts to become rich, without wealth-producing toil. There is toil, indeed; toil of scheming brains; toil of the spider weaving his cunning web and on watch for his prey; toil, terrible, anxious, burdened, flame-consumed, greed-cankered toil; but it is none of it toil of the plough; it is toil which does not produce wealth, not a molecule of it, but only *transfers* wealth which others make from one pocket to a second. Men grow rich on the Stock Exchange, but on the whole they are as useless to the community as the whining beggar in the streets, who never did a day's work in his life. Their getting rich does not mean that so much more wealth has been made by labour; that there has been an increase of the nation's goods—not at all; it simply means that someone else has been beggared, and the wealth transferred, as the watches and purses in the pockets of travellers in a stage coach used to be transferred to the pouch of the highwayman.

Who can measure the misery produced by such events as the Liberator failure, the Panama fraud, and the acquisition of Jay Gould's fortune. A great battle would not cause so much desolation, nor wreck so many happy homes, nor be responsible for so many broken hearts. The ravenous wolf was a kindlier neighbour than Jay Gould; the pestilence was less productive of grief than the rapacities of the Liberator; and a good earthquake could not do so much damage as the Panama bubble. And it all arises from the passion to get rich without working for it, and to acquire wealth without the hand on the plough.

I repeat, nearly all our misery and crime arise from this one cause. You often hear that misery and crime are due to drink; you hear it from bishops, judges, preachers, and editors. Far be it from me to question the baneful influence of our drinking customs, or to stay the hand of the temperance reformer. But no good comes from exaggeration. Because drink is a common accompaniment of misery and crime, it is set down as its one only cause. Not so; its most fruitful cause is the desire to get wealth without working for it. The love of money far more than the love of drink is the root of all kinds of evil. Greed after ill-gotten gain is more than anything else the world's curse. The law of Nature is that a certain quantity of work is necessary to produce a certain quantity of goods, of one kind or another. If you want knowledge, you must toil for it; if food, you must toil for it; if pleasure, you must toil for it. But men do not acknowledge this law, or strive to evade it, hoping to get their knowledge, food, and pleasure for nothing, and in this effort they either fail of getting them, and remain ignorant, poor, and miserable, or they obtain them by making other men work for their benefit, and then they are tyrants and robbers. "I am not one of those," writes Mr. Ruskin, "who in the least doubts or disputes the progress of this century in many things useful to mankind; but it seems to me a very dark sign concerning us, that we look with so much indifference upon dishonesty and cruelty in the pursuit of wealth. In the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, it was only the feet of the image that were part of iron and part of clay; but many of us are now getting so cruel in our avarice that it seems as if, in us, the *heart* were part of iron and part of clay."

And what shall we say of the kind of murder associated with gigantic swindling? How many deaths have been hastened by the Liberator and Panama? As many, I venture to affirm, as by the battle of Waterloo. It is murder of innocent people, moreover, not combatants; nay, even a sort of cannibalism—eating people—yes, and God's people too—eating them as a dainty meal.

There are two favourite ways of getting wealth in this country otherwise than by the hand on the plough. One is the practice of trying to cheapen and buy goods at a price which we know cannot give a living wage to the labour employed in producing them. Sweated labour, starved seamstresses, all the cheapness of goods due to

reduction of wages—"grinding the face of the poor" the Bible calls it—all the wonderful bargains which so much delight our souls, and which mean a loaf less for the hungry children, —labour exacted for insufficient pay. "Now, whenever we buy such goods," says Ruskin, "let us remember that we are stealing human labour. Don't let us mince the matter; let us look that plain Saxon word in the face—*stealing*, *i.e*, taking from the labourer the proper reward for his work, and putting it into our own pocket." You know well enough those goods could not have been offered you at the price unless distress of some kind had forced the producer to part with them. You know, when you come to think of it, that somebody has *lost* what you have gained, and that you are enriched without giving a fair equivalent in return. Some cheapness is admissible, and some cheapness is execrable. The cheapness which arises from improved machinery, improved methods of business, new discoveries, better organisation, is a cheapness which benefits everybody. But the cheapness which comes from taking advantage of people's distress, or ignorance, or weakness, to squeeze their wages down to the minimum that just suffices to keep the breath in the body is a cause of crime. This is the popular and fashionable way of taking our own hands off the plough-handle, and binding another's upon it. It is the economical way; the way in which a man may walk and amass great wealth, and still be counted virtuous.

The second way is that of gambling and speculation. It is not denied that there are speculations which are fair and honest. Speculations made with our own money, and which do not involve in their success the loss by others what we gain. But generally modern speculation involves much risk to others, with chance of profit only to ourselves. "Even in its best conditions it is only one of the forms of treasure-hunting or gambling; it is either leaving the steady plough, and the steady pilgrimage of life, to look for silver mines by the way, or else it is sitting down at the dice-tables in Vanity Fair, investing all thoughts and passions of the soul in the fall of the cards, and choosing rather the wild accidents of idle fortune, than the calm and accumulative rewards of toil." And this is destructive to our peace and virtue, but how much more to the peace and virtue of others. The operations of the Jay Gould's, big or little, on the Stock Exchange, always means ruin to somebody. You cannot win without another losing. Or, take the desperate business speculations into which men rush, and which generally end in bankruptcy. Have you ever tried to measure the guilt and suffering and mortality caused by the failure of a great business, or a great bank, or such a concern as the Liberator? Think of the families thrust out of comfort into the gutter; of children robbed of bread and education; of old men and women suddenly deprived of the savings of a life-time; of the girls driven on to the streets for a livelihood; of the frail, trembling spinster, with her little all swallowed up in the black gulf, and compelled to seek work at a ruinous rate of pay, breaking down at the touch of unaccustomed hardships into disease and death, and all this brought about, not by the fair course of appointed circumstance, but, by miserable greed and wanton treachery.

Always the definite result of forsaking the plough for gambling, or seeking to get wealth by other means than vital, useful labour, is assuredly and constantly the death of a certain number of persons every year by our hands, and therefore the choice given to every man born into this world, is simply whether he will be a labourer or an assassin,—"that whoever has not his hand on the stilt of the plough, has it on the hilt of the dagger."

But while girding at great offenders like the Liberator, or the Panama, or the Glasgow Bank, let us see that our own hands are clean. There may be reckless gambling in the conduct of a small business as in a large one, and immoral speculation by the shopkeeper as well as the stock-broker. You may play chuck-farthing in trade as truly as the boys in a dark alley. You may get wealth without giving honest labour for it in buying for the rise or fall of only a few hundreds, as truly as the millionaire in "bearing" or "bulling" the market. In all ranks of society one sees this passion—the desire to lay hold of wealth without the sweat and strain of driving the plough through the furrow. What we want is more respect for labour, less of that indiscriminate admiration for mere wealth, never mind how it has been acquired, which is so ugly a feature of society; we want to insist on the dignity and happiness which are possible to

moderate incomes; to show the same abhorrence of indirect theft that we do for direct and open stealing; we want to teach men that material development is the smallest part of the education of life; we want to apply a stern moral criticism to the means by which fortunes are built up, and to accord more honour than we do to serviceable toil for God and man, and to the hand on the plough.

JOSEPH WOOD.

Historic Notes on Midland Churches.

No. X.

ALCESTER—OLD MEETING HOUSE.

Ministers.

Samuel Tickner	
Joseph Porter	-1721
Richard Rogerson	1723-1733
George Brodhurst...	-1773 ?
Benjamin Evans	1774-1785
Benjamin Maurice	1785-1814
Christian Newton Saint	-1817
Thomas Warren	1821-1 64
William Henry Eastlake	1 Jan.-31 Dec., 1872
Thomas Wilson Scott (closed 1882-1893)	1 Jan.-31 Dec., 1873
John Dale...	9 Sept., 1893-

This chapel is one belonging to that very small group which has fortunately escaped the restorer's and the remodeller's hands, and remains to-day well-nigh in its original condition, and as perfect as when it was opened. The oak pulpit with square sounding board, the marble tablet close by to the memory of Joseph Porter, the stone font, the nine-light brass candelabrum with the dove and olive branch in its beak, the Communion pews with their quaint method of forming long narrow tables by half folding over the backs of the seats, and the wealth of carved woodwork are all here and in perfect condition, giving the worshipper of to day a true picture of the interior of a meeting house loved and adorned by their forefathers. Truly do we re-echo the words of the Rev. Joseph Wood at the re-opening rervice on 13th July, 1893, when he said it was a building which ought no more to be touched than Westminster Abbey.

In 1820 T[imothy] D[avis], of Evesham, wrote a very short account of the "Old Presbyterian Meeting House at Alcester" and sent it to the *Monthly Repository;* it was mislaid at the time, but fortunately recovered after a while and inserted in the issue of March, 1823. The ejected minister at Alcester was Samuel Tickner, described by Calamy as "a very holy, self-denying, peaceable man, a hard student, and of a tender spirit. He continued with his people, who were some of the most wealthy in the parish, after he was turned out in 1662, preaching constantly to them, but rarely in time of public service. His moderation, however, did not secure him from the spite of invidious neighbours, who informed against him. This forced him to confine himself, and to preach more privately. Hereupon, though he was of a strong constitution, he quickly fell into a deep consumption. An eminent physician affirmed that this confinement was the cause. The old informers represented him to the magistrates as only pretending sickness; but an officer who came to apprehend him found him under the arrest of death." To Tickner, then, belongs the honour of being the founder of this society. From the records of the Meeting House we find that a congregation was worshipping in a house on the site of the present chapel in the year 1693. Joseph Porter (mentioned in Dr Evans's list 1714-1729) ministered here, and during his time the chapel was built, and he was expected to preach at its opening, but death claimed him on 24th August, 1721, in the 62nd year of his age. T. D. says "how long he was at Alcester, where he brought up young men to the ministry, as well as officiated as pastor to the congregation, does not appear." He was followed by Richard Rogerson, from Coventry, who from 1717 to 1723 was minister there of the Great Meeting, prior to which he had ministered at Duffield, near Derby. He remained at Alcester till 1733, when he succeeded Dr. Ebenezer Lawrence at the Hanover Square Congregation, Newcastle-on-Tyne, where he remained until his death in 1760.

The next minister whose name we meet with at Alcester is George Brodhurst, who probably succeeded Rogerson. He died at Alcester in August, 1775, having resigned the ministry a year or two before through ill-health. He was the son of Edward Brodhurst, minister of the Old Meeting, Birmingham, from 1714 to 1730.

In 1774, Benjamin Evans became minister. He was "born on the beautiful banks of the river Tivy," near to the charmingly situated village of Llandyssul, where the writer, in company with other ministers' sons, was educated by the late loved Rev William Thomas, M.A. (Gwlym Marles of bardic title). Evans was first settled at Newport, Monmouth, and on leaving Alcester, in 1785, became minister at Stockton-on-Tees, where he died on 9th March, 1834, at the advanced age of 89.

In 1785, Benjamin Maurice, a native of Pembrokeshire, succeeded to the Alcester ministry, and remained here until his death, on 11th February, 1814. His biographer, "N" of Coventry, tells us that his salary "of late years was little more than £20 per annum," and that "he was not unnoticed by the noble marquis, who resides in the neighbourhood. To the honor of this nobleman, and as a circumstance favourable to the memory of the dead, it may be mentioned that he instructed a gentleman to inform Mr. Maurice in his illness that he should never want. From the worthy rector of the parish, and a respectable gentleman of the faculty, well known to the royal family, the subject of this account received the kindliest of attentions at all times, but particularly in his illness; neither medical nor pecuniary aid were wanting. From several professional gentlemen, — from Catholics (who are numerous in that neighbourhood) and Churchmen, from some of the Baptist persuasion, as well as from individuals of his own congregation—he experienced great kindness. "O, Christian love! How lovely and how powerful is thy operation when strengthening the virtuous feelings of our nature. No different modes of worship; no diversity of religious opinions can extinguish thy sacred flame."

GEORGE EYRE EVANS,
Dodington Parsonage,
Whitchurch, in Salop.

(To be concluded next month.)

Why stay we on earth unless we grow?
BROWNING.

A man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?
BROWNING.

The Neglect of Public Worship.

[*Five questions addressed by one of our ministers to his congregation at the New Year.*]

1. Are you sure your own moral enthusiasm and religious sensibilities do not suffer from the neglect of public worship? It is very few men indeed who, concerning the great deep things of heart, and life, and conscience, can do without the aids that are to be found in special acts, special times, special places, the association of brethren, and the help of others. There may be exceptions, but as a rule no man is fully able to live up to the grand principles of our faith who turns away from the precious outward signs and visible embodiments of them, which lie in social worship and in the services of prayer and praises. He must be very strong who does not need them, or very weak who does not know that he needs them. I am certain of this, that nowhere else can the fading vow of self-sacrificing love be so surely freshened as in the services of the Church; that nowhere else can hope for the world and trust in God be so surely kept alive as in the communion of worship.

2. Are you sure that you are not inflicting a great blow upon Liberal Christianity by the neglect of public worship? It is a constant reproach laid at our door that our services are cold. But how can there be warmth in our services when half the congregation are absent? The minister does not make the warmth; that is supplied by the presence of numbers, each man bringing his quota of fuel to the fund of sympathy. Again, we are met with the reproach (alas! too often deserved) that to take up with liberal views is presently to become indifferent to religion itself. What answer can empty pews give to that reproach? I will not speak of the depressing, chilly effect of empty pews upon the minister! It is enough to say that our half empty churches create a prejudice against us and our faith which it is in our own power to dispel.

3. Are you sure that you are not depriving your fellow church members of a measure of grace by your absence from public worship? It may be true that you can do without the sympathy and communion of your fellowmen in religion, but the point is that they cannot do without you. They need the sympathy of your presence, the help of your fervour, and the

encouragement of your kindly looks. It is something to others that you should be there, since you help to make strong and full the spiritual currents that flow from heart to heart, and without you the worship is poorer and the blessing scantier than it would have been.

4. Are you sure you are not putting a stumbling block in the way of the religious development of your children, and our young people generally, by your neglect of public worship? Many men think the church good for their children, and keep up their connection with it on this account, insisting on their attendance, who yet themselves are rarely seen within the church doors. Anything more fatal to the religious life of their children I cannot imagine. It is another instance of the superiority of an ounce of example to a ton of precept. Young people are quick to notice the absence of their seniors, quick to take upon themselves the airs of seniority, quick to draw the conclusion that the habit of public worship their elders have largely renounced will be foolish in them to contract.

5. Are you sure you are putting Sunday to the best possible use in the way you spend it? I am no Sabbatarian. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." I am for making Sunday as bright, cheerful, and recreative as is consistent with its blessed immunity from week-day toil and cares. But is it asking too much that a couple of hours on the Sunday should be given to the consideration of the highest things, and the cultivation of the spiritual life? Is Sunday really turned to the best account by a dose of newspaper and novel reading; by games and social excitements; by boating and cycle excursions; by clearing off one's private correspondence? It is not that any of these things are wrong, even on Sunday: I only ask are they the best you can make of that inestimable boon—a day of rest? Surely the question for a thoughtful man to ask is, how far is it possible for me to escape from the common cares, common pursuits, and common excitements of this hurried, over-driven, dusty life; how far can I dwell for a few hours of the week in a fairer world, breathe a purer air, and rejoice in a diviner heaven? Sunday is a day to remind ourselves, and to declare to others, that we are not merely shopkeepers, merchants, mechanics, lawyers, but MEN, children of God, and heirs of Immortality. To neglect its religious opportunities is not indeed to break a commandment—it is to use a great gift for something lower than its highest purpose.

A New Year's Wish.

I ask one little boon
Of the New Year;
May I through all its days
Carry some cheer
To those who sit in gloom,
Weeping for loss;
To hearts that slowly break
Under a cross.

I who have left my dead
With none to care;
I who have wept alone
Facing despair,—
Would gladly sweeten lives
And make them dear,—
This little boon I ask
Of the New Year.

My best can serve the gods,
Their circuits run,
Who call no love their own
Under the sun.
Let me bear help to want,
And hope to fear;
I ask no other boon
Of the New Year.

The Essentials of Christianity.

The *first* great truth taught by Christ is that there is One Almighty Being, whose nature is goodness and love, who is in a father's relation to every human soul. The *second* follows from it, that we are one and all, children of God, and bound up forever with him as a child with a father. The *third* is that on account of this there is spiritual brotherhood of all men, which carries with it all the duties and loves of brotherhood. The *fourth* is that, since the Father is immortal, so are the children, and that all those whom we call dead, and all those whom we now call living, and that all who shall be born are alive now in the thonght of God, and shall be loving and thinking and resting forever and ever in a vast humanity which will attain perfection in God and enjoy him forever and ever. And, *fifth*, these carry with them the final overthrow of all evil, and the faith that, in spite of all that seemingly contradicts them, Love and Righteousness rule and develop the world.

STOPFORD A. BROOKE.

The Parables of Jesus.

LESSON-NOTES FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS.

I.

WHAT IS A PARABLE?

[Read Matt. xiii., 10-17, 34-35.]

In this chapter Jesus begins a new way of teaching. Hitherto He had taught mostly by short sayings, *i.e.:* "Judge not, that ye be not judged," "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," etc. But now He adopts a different method—the parabolic; short stories that mean something good, only not easy at first to make out the meaning. The word *Parable* signifies "placing beside," placing one thing side by side with another to shew likeness or difference. They are illustrations—truths seen in pictures. Always popular in the East, they were used to make clear or waken attention; as in the story of the Rabbi, who, one sultry afternoon, when his listeners had become drowsy, suddenly burst out, "There was once a woman in Egypt who brought forth at one birth six hundred thousand men!" At this his hearers roused themselves, and then the teacher calmly went on to tell them that her name was Jochabed, and that she was the mother of Moses, who brought that number of armed men out of Egypt. Of this art of teaching by parable and striking illustration Jesus was a master. All poetry is full of parables—images—little pictures. All our talk is full of parables—everything is "*like*," like a fire, like running water, like a rock, like the dawn, like a storm, like the sunshine, like "a year without a spring." An old lady, once asked what parts the Bible she liked best, answered, "I like best *the likes*." Jesus began so many of his talks by saying, "To what is the matter *like?*" and then He pictured men at their daily toil in vineyard, town, and field, and on the lake: their barterings, merriments, mournings, and devotions; the children playing in the market-place; the debtors hailed to prison; the corn-fields, the flowers, the birds of the air, in all shewing his observing skill.

But a particular reason is given why Jesus resorted to the parabolic form of teaching (v. 10—15). His plain, direct teaching in simple precepts had been met with scorn and reviling, unbelief and hardness. So now He wrapped up His great moral and spiritual truths in stories. Those whose hearts were right, who were really truth-seekers, would have no difficulty in seeing the truth within the story; but those who came to mock would see *only* the story. In a parable some see less of truth and some more, just as shade of lamp makes light brighter on one side and darker on other.

The parables of Jesus will be found in the first three gospels. There are none in John—nor are there any in the Epistles. Of parables proper Jesus spake in all thirty-one. They may be divided into three groups—(1) Parables of the Kingdom of God in its nature and growth. (2) Parables of Life, Sympathy, and Duty, (3) Parables of Judgment. In the first group are the seven recorded in Matt. xiii., with the accompanying one found only in Mark iv. The second group will be found mostly in Luke, and includes the Good Samaritan, the Rich Fool, the Prodigal Son, the Fig-Tree, the Great Supper, the Unjust Steward, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Unjust Judge, the Pharisee and the Publican, the Labourer in the Vineyard, etc., etc. The third group belongs to the close of Christ's ministry, and includes the Pounds, the Two Sons, the Vineyard let out to Husbandmen, the Marriage Feast, the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the Talents, and the Sheep and the Goats.

Ask each member of the class to invent a parable—as, What is cheerfulness like? Like sunshine. What is a sullen temper like? Like a cloudy and chilly day in November. What is like a pleasant companion? A rose without a thorn. See also the parables in popular expressions—"As cross as two sticks," "Helping a lame dog over a stile," etc.

Elder scholars may be taught to distinguish the parable from (*a*) Fable, (*b*) Myth, (*c*) Allegory. A fable makes animals, or trees, or flowers talk like men. See *Judges* ix., 8—15. A myth is a story which has grown up unconsciously, in which the original germ of fact has been amplified by fancy, devotion, hope. See *Genesis* i. An allegory identifies the symbol with that which is symbolised—as, "I am the Vine," not, "I am *like* a vine," and, "I am the Good Shepherd," instead of, "I am *like* a good shepherd." Parables turn the solid ore of great truths into current coin:

> "When truth in closest words shall fail—
> Truth embodied in a tale
> Shall enter in at lowly doors."

II.

THE SOWER.

[Read Matt xiii., 1-9, 18-23.

The *first* of Christ's parables. This chapter contain seven parables about the kingdom of God, like seven pearls threaded on one string. [For elder scholars. In a general view of this group of seven, we see that the first pair—"The Sower" and "The Tares"—set forth the manner of establishing the divine kingdom, and the obstacles it must encounter. Good seed and tares are both *ideas*—ideas true and ideas false. The divine kingdom is established, not by force, but by persuasion; not by swords but by thoughts. The second pair—"The Mustard Seed" and "The Leaven"—set forth the growth of the kingdom from a small beginning to a great issue. The third group—"The Hid Treasure" and "The Pearl"—point out the duty of the disciple to be in earnest, and to sacrifice anything for the truth; while the seventh, which stands alone, shows that the divine kingdom on earth will contain all sorts of characters.] For junior scholars, picture the scene—the crowd on the shore—the ploughed fields behind, with here and there a rock jutting through—the sower in the distance with his apron full of seed—Jesus so pushed by the crowd, who all want to see him, getting into a boat, rowing away a few feet from the shore—see him raise his hand for silence, and then point to the sower. Later on he himself gives the interpretation.

In all religions, teachers of truth, givers of ideas, have been called *sowers*, and their thoughts have been called seeds.

How is it truth does not win and convince everybody? How is it Jesus does not always succeed? How is it the good news of God's love does not conquer?

Is the fault in the sower?—No. In the seed?—No. Where then?—*In the soil.* Jesus points out that there are four kinds of hearts which are like four kinds of soil:—

1. *Hard-hearted* (v. 4-19).—Path hardened by the constant tread of men's feet; seed can't get in; lies loose; birds pick it up. Hearts hardened by the constant tread of bad *habits*, trodden down by the feet of *custom*; by the feet of sin. The birds that snatch away, are the flock of light, swift-winged thoughts that swoop down whenever a good seed falls and snatch it away; the swarm of evil thoughts that buzz about the mind, and prevent us giving heed to the right and true.

2. *Faint-hearted.*—Seed grows, but soon withers. Why?—*No root.* Thin layer of earth over a rock; no depth of character—shallow—fickle—unsteady. Teacher's word falls on boy's ear, and into his heart, and he is moved to right, and love, and self-denial, and duty; keeps right a little—then the sneer and the hard word—he can't stand that—goes back. Why?—*No root!*

3. *Half-hearted.*—Some seed falls on ground *already occupied.* Thorns, weeds, and briars are there; these spring up too and choke the good. The teacher speaks, but the hearers are thinking so much of other things—of sport, or money-getting. *Whole*-hearted people are wanted. Concentrate the mind on one thing. "Whatever is worth doing, is worth doing well."

4. *True-hearted.* Only a fourth part of the seed sown finds its reward, but that reward is so abundant it makes up for all loss. For the one wheat seed dropped into good soil will often yield a hundred grains; and one truth, when it takes hold of a mind, heart, and conscience, influences many others. One honest, sincere, upright man is worth a host of trucklers.

Ask your scholars to give some instances from Bible story of these four kinds of hearts:—1. Pharaoh and Festus; 2 The Galatians (Gal. v.); 3. Balaam, Judas, Ananias; 4. Nathaniel, Lydia.

Jesus himself, the great Sower, and his parables—the seed—truth in its seed-form, compact—suggesting much that it would take long to tell. All people are, and must be, seed sowers. Deeds, words, looks, tones are all seeds We may sow the "wind"—(Hos. viii.) We may sow to the "flesh"—(Gal. vi. 7), or we may sow righteousness"—(Prov. xi. 18). What harvest from these? Much seed sown in Sunday school? Has it fallen into good soil?

III.

THE TARES.

[Read Matt. xiii, 24-30 and 36-43].

INTRODUCTORY.—In Christ's first parable the *seed* was all good. It was the *soil* which was at fault. In this parable the difference in the seed itself. There is good seed and bad seed; but the good seed of the former parable is the "word," *i.e.*—ideas, thoughts, truth, whereas the good seed of this parable is good men, and the bad seed is bad men, and its point and lesson is that we are not in this life to cut the bad off from communion with the good; we are not to divide society into black and white; we are not to decide who are God's children and who are not, but to be tolerant, and charitable unto all, leaving it to God and the future to do the work of separation. Must not press to an extreme the details of this parable. Does not run on all fours. Tares cannot be changed into wheat, but bad men can be changed into good men. Satan, the principle and personification of evil, cannot *create* children of darkness; he can only *spoil* children of light. But men are first of all good seed—then degenerate. It is necessary, at least with elder scholars, to point out these limitations of the parable.

EXPLANATORY.—Verse 25. "*Tares*," a bastard or degenerate wheat of a poisonous nature, very similar in appearance to wheat. The malicious practice on which this parable is based, even now not unknown in the east. "See that lurking villain watching for the time when his neighbour shall plough his field, and goes in the night following and casts in *pandinella i.e.*, pig-paddy; this being of rapid growth springs up before the good seed, and scatters itself before the others can be reaped, so that the poor owner of the field will be years before he can get rid of the troublesome weed"—(*Roberts*). *Trench* says he has known in Ireland an outgoing-tenant, in spite at his ejection, to sow wild oats in the field he was leaving; and *Alford* mentions that a field of his own was once sown with shamrock over the wheat.

Verse 38—"*The field is the world.*"—The sphere where good and bad men alike grow, and live, and flourish; the field for the good seed is not a monastery, or hermitage, or sacred enclosure called the Church. They are to live in the world, though not of the world.

LESSONS.—*Judge not.* If we try and make out in a church, school, class, which are "tares" and which are 'wheat" we shall make many mistakes. *Some* clear enough, but many doubtful. The good are becoming the bad, the bad are becoming the good. Moreover, no one is all good, and no one is all bad. Some novelists make their good characters like angels—no faults at all; and their bad characters—devils, with hoof and tail. Not true to human nature, which is never all black and never all white. Churches have been led into frightful cruelties and persecutions by trying to root out what they judged to be tares:—

(*a*) The faulty, the unholy, the careless, the sometimes insincere, the worldly,—out of a mistaken zeal for the *purity* of the Church it has been proposed to cut these off from the fellowship of the good.

(*b*) The heretics, the doubters, the deniers of old doctrines, the setters at-naught of old customs and familiar ritual, the bringers-in of new thoughts,—these also have been spoken of as tares, and men have tried to root them out. Think of St. Bartholomew's Day, and that mighty effort to root up and destroy what men thought to be tares, but which was much of God's own wheat. Judge not. Those we would judge harshly and root up, God may judge mercifully. Draw out the same lesson from Arnold's sonnet:

" *He saves the sheep, the goats He doth not save!*
So rang Tertullian's sentence, on the side
Of that unpitying Phrygian sect which cried:
'Him can no fount of fresh forgiveness lave
Who sins, once wash'd by the baptismal wave.'
So spake the fierce Tertullian. But she sigh'd,
The Infant Church! of love she felt the tide
Stream on her from her Lord's yet recent grave.
And then she smil'd; and in the catacombs,
With eye suffused but heart inspired true,
On those walls subterranean, where she hid
Her heart 'mid ignominy, death, and tombs,
She the Good Shepherd's hasty image drew—
And on his shoulders, not a lamb, a kid!"

IV.

THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE LEAVEN.

[Read Matt. xiii., 31-33; also Mark iv., 30-30.]

INTRODUCTORY.—With these twin parables should be read the Parable of Secret Growth, in Mark iv., 26 29, which develops the same idea. The main thought in these three parables is the quiet but sure and continuous progress of truth. Christ's teaching, the ideas He gave, grow in silence and often out of sight; but their growth nothing can check. Teachers of truth may be crucified, but the truth cannot be crucified. Once sown it spreads abroad, and nothing can destroy it. Often it seems that the cause of truth and right is hopeless. We see no progress. So it was with the Christian Church. It had small and slight beginnings. Twelve poor, unknown men once constituted the Christian Church, and their leader was just killed. Despise not the day of small things. The things that finally conquer do not come with a flourish of trumpets, but quietly, secretly, slowly.

EXPLANATORY.—V. 31. "Mustard-seed,"—not the plant we cultivate, but a shrub or bush or small tree. V 32, "Least of all seeds,"—not to be taken literally; many seeds were smaller. The grain of mustard-seed was a proverbia type among the Jews of anything exceedingly minute. V. 32, "Birds of the air come and lodge," etc. Many birds nest in bushes. V. 33, "Leaven"—a piece of sour dough, which, put into the baking, made it light, or, as we say, "rise." This is still done in France. In this country we use yeast for the same purpose, or baking powder. V. 33. "Three measures of meal,"—seems to have been the usual quantity for one baking.

LESSONS.—These parables alike teach that growth of the Gospel, or of any great idea, or of any new truth, is *silent, slow*, and *sure*. Truth makes no noise, does not "cry aloud in the streets." The seed makes no noise, nor the leaven. You cannot hear the grass grow, nor the dough rise. Many illustrations: the things we feel most deeply we are most silent about. The brook chatters over the stones and rushes on noisily: the great river is silent. War makes a great commotion: thoughts which outlive all wars work quietly. The truth is slow: goodness is slow: right is slow. Some things diffuse themselves rapidly—poisons. Poison so deadly and rapid that the cup falls from the suicide's hand. So it is with some sins. But what is good operates slowly. Five hundred summers must shine on the oak before it attains full maturity. Twenty or thirty years of growth are needed to make the infant into a man. It took the Jews a thousand years to learn the truth of Monotheism. But the growth of truth is *sure*, as sure as the dawn must grow into the day, or the winter pass into spring.

The MUSTARD-SEED points to the *outward increase* of Christianity. It began with a few fishermen who talked of converting the world. How foolish. It is now the secret of Western civilisation, and the birds lodge in its branches. The Church sheltered and fostered art, literature, freedom. [In elder classes reference might be made to a disposition prevalent in some quarters to forget how much of the political and social advancement of mankind, and the amelioration of the conditions of human existence, is owing to Christianity and Christian institutions. "They have lodged in the branches thereof."]

The LEAVEN points to the *inward growth* of Christianity: its growth in the soul, in the character, till intellect and affections, will and desire, the whole man through and through is permeated with its spirit. Leaven is morally an image of evil. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," which so secretly creeps into the very heart of goodness and corrupts it. But Jesus saw it to be an image also of good. Jesus himself is the leaven which is to leaven the whole lump—the whole human family. The leaven is a spot of stirring energy which creeps from point to point, penetrating, subtle, persuasive. Irresistibly it works to change, enlarge, and sweeten, and uplift.

It is only leaven can change the housewife's dough into palatable bread. Put a stone there, a diamond, a piece of gold or a piece of granite, and the meal will remain the same. Only love of God and man can work on character to change it from evil to good. Put learning there, or wealth, or philanthropy, or better surroundings, and the heart will remain the same. The Divine Leaven is the Spirit of Love.

JOSEPH WOOD.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND UNITARIANISM.

Says the author of "Six Months at the White House," with reference to the religious creed of President Lincoln: "The conversation turned upon religious subjects, and Mr. Lincoln made this impressive remark: "I have never united myself to any church, because I have found difficulty in giving my assent, without mental reservation, to the long, complicated statements of Christian doctrine which characterize their articles of belief and confessions of faith. When any church will inscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership, the Saviour's condensed statement of the substance of both Law and Gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all my soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' that church will I join with all my heart and with all my soul."

Had President Lincoln only known it, there is one Christian church which does "inscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership," exactly this sublime injunction of Jesus.

THE CHILDREN'S PAGE.

One of Our Angels.

Through the dreary streets of London,
Passed a child of tender years;
Lo! her tiny feet were way-worn,
In her feverish eyes were tears.

Down at last beside a mansion,
Sank she hungry, bitter cold,
From her face upon its marble
Silent tears of misery rolled.

On the shadowed pavement lighted,
From her carriage, young and gay,
The fair daughter of a noble,
Radiant—a starry fay.

Bent she was on childish pleasure,
Happy, dreaming of the dance;
When, beside the mansion's threshold,
Caught her eye by sudden chance,

That sad, crouching, half-hid figure,
In the gloaming dimly seen,
With her garments spare around her,
And her sad and pallid mien.

As the silent figure moved not,
Boldly she drew very nigh.
"Who are you?" she wondering questioned,
And a sob was her reply.

"So unhappy!" thus she murmured,
While she seized a yielding hand.
"Oh! how cold. I thought all children
Lived like me in this fair land."

"Come with me, and I will take you
Where is warmth, and food to spare,"
So as in a dream she led her,
The festivities to share.

Hand in hand they slowly entered
The immense illumined hall;
At the stranger, while guests wonder,
"Get you gone," the servants call.

Then the maiden faced them proudly,
"Welcome her, my sister she!"
But no welcome had the high-born
For the child of low degree.

Scornful menials seized her roughly,
From her sweet companion tore,
Cast her forth upon the darkness,
Closed and barred the ponderous door.

But the noble, princely maiden,
Turned on them her flashing gaze:
"I will love my little sister,
None shall separate our ways.'

Then a glow her face encircled,
Ope'd the door upon the night,
Vainly startled dames and servants
Strove to stay her sudden flight.

Unseen powers held them bounden,
Forces they could not control;
While into the wintry darkness
Passed the child of wintry soul.

Crying softly, "sister! sister!"
Till she found the child she sought.
Oh! her parents greatly marvelled
At the visitor she brought.

A. A. CHARLESWORTH.

Ballade of Yule.

This life's most jolly, Amiens said,
Heigh-ho, the Holly! So sang he.
As the good Duke was comforted
In forest exile, so may we!
The years may darken as they flee,
And Christmas bring his melancholy:
But round the old mahogany tree
We drink, we sing, *Heigh-ho, the Holly!*

Though some are dead and some are fled
To lands of summer over sea,
The holly-berry keeps his red,
The merry children keep their glee;
They hoard with artless secrecy
This gift for Maud and that for Molly,
And Santa Claus he turns the key
On Christmas Eve, *Heigh-ho, the Holly!*

Amid the snows the birds are fed,
The snow lies deep on lawn and lea,
The skies are shining overhead,
The robin's tame that was so free
Far north, at home, the "barley bree"
They brew; they give the hour to folly,
How "Rob and Allan came to pree,"
They sing, we sing *Heigh-ho, the Holly!*

ENVOI.

Friend, let us pay the wonted fee,
The yearly tithe of mirth: be jolly!
It is a duty so to be,
Though half we sigh, *Heigh-ho, the Holly!*

ANDREW LANG.

(*From "A Volume of Fugitive Rhymes."*)

News from the Field.

BANBURY (*Christchurch Chapel*).—On Wednesday evening, December 5th, a very successful concert and entertainment was held in the schoolroom of the above chapel. There was a large attendance of friends. Mr. Alderman Mawle occupied the chair during the evening. At the close of the meeting the minister (Rev. H. Hill) proposed, Mr. Briscoe seconded, and Mr. Mann supported, a hearty vote of thanks to the Chairman for presiding, and to the young ladies and gentlemen who had so generously contributed to the enjoyment of the evening. Mr. F. T. C. Webb, the organist, and Miss Rogers were the accompanists on the piano.

LYE.—(*School Extension Fund, &c.*)—Amount already acknowledged as promised or received: £189 12s. 6d. Since received: A Friend, Leeds, £2; Mr. R. W. Wright, Croydon, £1 1s.; Mr. T. Ashton, Didsbury, £1; Mr. F. J. Kitson, Leeds, £1; Mrs. Luccock, Leeds, £1; Mr. Jeremiah Brookes, Lye, 10s.; Mr. C. Butterwith, Kendal, 10s.; Mr. G. W. Chitty, Dover, 10s.; Mrs. Field, Cheltenham, 10s. Total amount subscribed, £197 13s. 6d. During the past month Rupert Potter, Esq., of London, has sent us a very welcome gift in the shape of a harmonium for our Sunday School. An instrument was greatly needed, and through Mr. Potter's kindness we have one that gives great pleasure to all the friends here, who are deeply grateful for so timely a gift. The week before Christmas over £130 was paid to the members of the Sunday School Savings Club, who numbered in all 181.

SHREWSBURY.—Our friend and minister, Mr. Myers, is maintaining a gallant fight on the School Board against the clerical party, who have forced not only dogmatic teaching but the Apostles' Creed on the schools of the town. Owing to representations made by Mr. Myers to the Education Department, the Board has been rapped on the knuckles for examining the schools in religious subjects at other times than those specified in the time-tables as set apart for religious instruction. The Shrewsbury Board would clearly defy the law but for its wholesome fear of Mr. Myers.

WALSALL UNITARIAN FREE CHURCH.—The annual tea meeting of the above-named place of worship was held on Monday night, December 3rd. There was a fairly good attendance, though not quite so good as on previous years. After tea there was a short meeting held in the chapel, at which the minister (the Rev. P. Dean) delivered an address, referring to the experiences of the congregation during the past twelve months. He said the year before they had met under gloomy circumstances. They had just before then expended over £100 in chapel renovation, and were having the accounts to meet when quite an epidemic of congregational misfortunes had come upon them. Death carried off their treasurer, the late Mr. William Homer, a fellow-worker whose help they would long miss at that church. The long continuance of bad trade had caused them to get behind in their ordinary church funds. There were removals, and undeserved trouble and affliction in several of their families, and altogether the prospect twelve months before was very disheartening and depressing; but a steady and determined struggle with their difficulties had enabled them to overcome them. Notwithstanding that, in addition to renovating the chapel last year, they had this year renovated the schoolroom; their whole debt now for everything they owed was only about £30—(loud applause). As they would have next to nothing to expend on their buildings now for the next six or eight years, he thought they might easily wipe this off, and feel that they were again in a fairly-good financial condition. He made an appeal to them to give a better attendance at the Sunday services, especially at the Sunday morning one, which was their weak point. As a congregation they existed for worship, teaching, and work. It was because he wanted them to be able to show a good account as to the last of these that he, as their minister, devoted so much of his time to the public work of the town. Referring to his membership of the School Board, he said it was no unimportant task to be undertaking one-eleventh of the management of a great educational work like they now had going on in their board schools, where 8,000 of the children of Walsall were being trained and educated. The School Board election would again take place shortly, and the likelihood was that he would be asked to continue his work on the board, but whether on the board or not he should devote a good deal of his time to the affairs of the town, for he did not care to be the minister of a congregation who wanted their pastor's services all for themselves, for to him that appeared little better than a sort of ecclesiastical selfishness—(applause). —After the singing of several sacred pieces, the audience adjourned to the schoolroom, where an admirable entertainment, consisting of lime-light pictures, songs, duets, and instrumental pieces, was gone through. Messrs. E. A. Day and W. H. Bullock, assisted by Mr. G. W. Carver as lecturer, supplied the magnificent and humorous pictures. A glee party supplied by Mr. Plant, and who afforded the assembly an excellent treat in the singing of Mr. Bevan and Mrs. Plant, gave a portion of the musical entertainment. The other part was given by Mrs. Sproson Smith, Miss Ida Anderson, Mrs. Ginders, Mrs. W. Hodgkins, Miss Perks, and Miss Vickers, and Messrs. Alfred Ellis and A. Homer. The proceedings closed about ten o'clock with the expression of hearty thanks to the members of the Photographic Society and the other ladies and gentlemen who had united to give such an excellent evening's instruction and enjoyment.

WHITCHURCH.—The third of the special winter services in the Church of the Saviour was held on Wednesday, December 12th, when the Rev. John Page Hopps preached on "His Dream of Our Father's Church." Friends came from many miles round to meet Mr. Hopps again, who had not visited this country side since the induction of the minister in 1889.

The larger faith believes the best of everything. It believes the best of men, it believes the best of God. It cannot doubt that the best is Omnipotent.

Midland Church Calendar for January.

ALCESTER: The Old Meeting House.
Minister: Rev. John Dale, Salford House. Service at 6 p.m.

ATHERSTONE: Unitarian Chapel.
Minister: Rev. J. Howard, of Tamworth. Service at 3 p.m.

BIRMINGHAM: Church of the Messiah, Broad Street.
Minister: Rev. L. P. Jacks, M.A.
Services: 11 and 6-30.

BIRMINGHAM: The Hurst Street Mission.
Minister: Rev. W. J. Clarke, 160, Pershore Road.
Services: 10-15, 2-45, and 6-30.

BIRMINGHAM: The Fazeley Street Mission.
Minister: Rev. T. Pipe, 59, Great Brook Street.
Services: 11 and 6-30

BIRMINGHAM: The Newhall Hill Church.
Minister: Rev. A. A. Charlesworth, Reservoir Road, Edgbaston. Services: 11 and 6-30

BIRMINGHAM: The Old Meeting Church.
Minister: Rev. Joseph Wood, 120, Gough Road, Edgbaston. Services: 11 and 6-30.

BIRMINGHAM: The Church of the Saviour.
Minister: Rev. J. C. Street, Bristol Road, Edgbaston. Services: 11 and 6-30.

BIRMINGHAM: Small Heath, Little Green Lane Board School.
Minister: Rev. Edward J. Sale, 70, Whitmore Road, Small Heath. Service at 6-30 p.m.

BANBURY: Christchurch Chapel, Horse Fair.
Minister: Rev. H. Hill, 5, Crouch Street. Service: Evening 6-30.

CHESTERFIELD:
Minister: Rev. Ambrose Bennett, M.A. Services: 11 and 6-30.

COSELEY: The Old Meeting House.
Minister: Rev. Henry Eachus. Services: 11 and 6-30.

CRADLEY: Netherend Chapel.
Minister: Rev. E. P. Hall. Services 11 and 6-30.

DUDLEY: The Old Meeting House.
Minister: Rev. A. H. Shelley. Services: 11 and 6-30.

EVESHAM: Oat Street Meeting House.
Minister: Rev. Rudolf Davis. Services: 11 and 6-30.

KIDDERMINSTER:
Minister: Rev. E. D. Priestley Evans. Services: 10-30 and 6-30.

KINGSWOOD: Kingswood Chapel, Hollywood.
Minister: Rev. J. Hardinge Matthews. Services: 11 and 6-30.

LOUGHBOROUGH: Unitarian Chapel.
Minister: Rev. H. Haycock, Beacon Road. Services: 10-45 and 6-30.

OLDBURY: Unitarian Meeting House.
Minister: Rev. Henry McKean, The Dingle, Oldbury. Services: 11 and 6-30.

SHREWSBURY: High Street Church.
Minister: Rev E Myers, F.G.S., Claremont Hill. Services: 11 and 6-30.

STOURBRIDGE: Presbyterian Chapel.
Minister: Rev. A. W. Timmis. Services: 11 and 6-30.

TAMWORTH: Cole Hill Chapel.
Minister: Rev. J. Howard, 17, Aldergate. Services: 11 and 6-30.

THE LYE: Unitarian Chapel.
Minister: Rev. I. Wrigley, B.A. Service: 6-30.

WALSALL. Unitarian Free Church.
Minister: Rev. Peter Dean, 3, Sandwell Street. Services: 11-15 and 6-30.

WEST BROMWICH: Lodge Road Chapel.
Minister: Rev. John Harrison Jesson Street. Services: 11 and 6-30.

WHITCHURCH: Church of the Saviour.
Minister: Rev. George Eyre Evans, Doddington Parsonage. Services: 11, 2-15 for Children, 6-30.

WOLVERHAMPTON: Unity Church, Snow Hill.
Minister: Rev. L. G. Harris Crook, Oaklands Road. Services: 11 and 6-30.

THE SEED SOWER.

A Magazine for the Church, the School, and the Home.

Editors: Revs. L. P. JACKS, M.A., and JOSEPH WOOD.

THE SEED SOWER has now entered upon its third year with renewed promise of success. From many quarters testimony is borne to its usefulness and value. The Editors will spare no pains to maintain and increase its present high reputation. A feature of the New Year will be the "MANCHESTER COLLEGE PULPIT"—Sermons preached in Manchester College Chapel by our most distinguished Ministers.

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